

News release  
06/16/2015

Media contact:  
Meagan Racey (Northeast), 413-253-8558  
Georgia Parham (Midwest), 812-334-4261 x 1203  
Tom MacKenzie (Southeast), 404-679-7291

**Extinct eastern cougar subspecies proposed for removal  
from endangered species list**

*Cougars in the East are Florida panthers, released captives or dispersing from the West*

The eastern cougar (*Felis concolor couguar*) has likely been extinct for at least 70 years, according to a thorough review of data from researchers, states and Canadian provinces across the subspecies' range. In response to the review, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to remove the extinct subspecies from the endangered species list.

"We recognize that people have seen cougars in the wild in the eastern U.S.," said Martin Miller, the Service's Northeast Region Chief of Endangered Species. "Those cougars are not of the eastern cougar subspecies."

The Service completed the formal review of the eastern cougar in 2011. During the review, the Service examined the best available scientific and historic information, queried 21 states and eastern Canadian provinces, and reviewed hundreds of reports from the public. No states or provinces provided evidence of the existence of an eastern cougar population.

The Service concluded that cougars occasionally occur in eastern North America, but that they are either Florida panthers, dispersing animals from western populations, or have been released or escaped from captivity. The conclusions are based on a review of more than 100 reports dating back to 1900.

The eastern cougar subspecies was listed as endangered in 1973. However, accounts suggest that most eastern cougars disappeared in the 1800s as European immigrants killed cougars to protect themselves and their livestock, as forests were harvested, and as white-tailed deer, the cougar's primary prey, nearly went extinct in eastern North America. The last records of eastern cougars are believed to be in Maine (1938) and New Brunswick (1932).

Extinct animals and plants cannot be protected under the Endangered Species Act, which is meant to recover imperiled species and their habitats. Additionally, under law, the eastern cougar listing cannot be used as a method to protect other cougar subspecies. The proposal is available for public inspection June 16 at <https://www.federalregister.gov/public->

[inspection](#). From June 17 to August 17, 2015, the proposal will be available for review and comment at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) under docket no. FWS-R5-ES-2015-0001.

Wild cougar populations in the West have been expanding their range eastward in the last two decades, with individual cougars confirmed throughout the Midwest. Evidence of wild cougars dispersing farther east is extremely rare. In 2011, a solitary young male cougar traveled about 2,000 miles from South Dakota through Minnesota, Wisconsin and New York, and was killed on a Connecticut highway. A cougar of unknown origin was also killed in Kentucky in December 2014.

The Service's proposal to remove the eastern cougar from the endangered species list does not affect the status of the Florida panther, another cougar subspecies listed as endangered.

Additional information about eastern cougars, including frequently asked questions and cougar sightings, is at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/ecougar>. Find information about endangered species at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered>.